

Opinion

The Battalion

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We're still waiting

When he signed the prison management law into effect last month, Gov. Bill Clements promised that inmates released under the new law would be sent to halfway houses before they were allowed to return home.

Last week, however, 121 prisoners released under the new law happily bypassed halfway houses on their way home. Not only are Texas prisons' bars bulging beyond constitutionality, Texas halfway houses also are filled to capacity. Of the 261 prisoners released under the law, just 140 were sent to halfway houses.

Clements' general counsel and prison expert, Rider Scott, said, "The majority of the 261 would have been released from prison within a few days even without the prison act."

John Byrd, executive director of the Board of Pardons, echoed Scott's sentiments, only with a little more precision about the number of prisoners who would have been paroled even without the law. Coincidentally, Byrd said 140 of the 261 prisoners needed to go to halfway houses, and exactly 140 spaces were available for them.

But no matter how hard state officials try to make their efforts look successful, it's going to be difficult to make prematurely released prisoners cooperate.

"A burglar paroled last week from state prison kidnapped and raped his parole officer . . ." the *Houston Chronicle* reported Saturday.

Certainly, these things will happen even under the best of circumstances, but one can't help but wonder how often they will begin to occur while we wait for an intelligent solution for the overcrowding problem to be implemented.



Parents deserve combat pay

I was traveling down I-35 Saturday on my way back to College Station from Dallas, when a station wagon in the next lane caught my attention. You know the type, luggage rack on top, lots of vacation stuff in the back, dad and mom in the front seat, and the kids taking up every other inch of space avail-



Paula Vogrin

able in the car.

I glanced over to get a look at the vacationing family, and a girl about 10 years old grabbed her brother, who looked about eight, and started choking the stuffing out of him. As I watched the little boy gasping for breath, another girl, who looked about nine, climbed over the back seat and administered what looked like the Iron Claw on her sister. The way I saw it, these three kids were engaged in a life-or-death struggle. Then, just when I was sure the boy was turning purple and going into death throes, they all turned, looked directly at me and burst out laughing.

I drove past the family feeling a little sheepish — I should have known better than to fall for that old trick — my two sisters and I used to pull it all the time while on our own family vacations.

I looked in my rearview mirror in time to see them do the same thing to the car behind me. They brought back a slew of memories from my family vacation days.

When we moved to Texas from Illinois, I was four, my sister, Andrea, was two and my youngest sister, Lisa, was just a baby. Six months after we arrived in Texas, we took our first family vacation. We went to Padre Island. I don't know how my parents did it — 10 hours from Dallas to Padre in a station wagon with a pesky preschooler, a whining toddler and a screaming infant — some vacation. But from that year on, nothing could stop the Vogrin family from taking to the road and burning rubber all over the southern United States.

My parents took us to Padre Island every year for the next 14 years. And that wasn't the only place they took us; it was just the regular trip. We went to all the great Meccas of family tourism — Disney World, the Grand Canyon, and Carlsbad Caverns, to name just a few. We saw mountains and oceans and prairies and deserts and fields and forests and swamps and lakes and rivers and mesas and hills and every other geographic formation you can imagine. I can't begin to calculate how many hundreds of hours of road time my family amassed during our vacation years. But during those hours on the road I know my sisters and I put our parents through more grief, aggravation and total hell than any human being deserves.

My mother had the job of creating ways to entertain three girls, aged two years apart, with attention spans of 45 seconds or less. Her first solution was

auto bingo. It's just like regular bingo except instead of numbers in the squares, there are pictures of things like airplanes, policemen, dogs, pictures, bridges, etc. We watched other cars like hawks, making sure we covered something they didn't see. Mom always had a prize for the winner, but nobody could win more than the others because she bought an enormous number of prizes for everybody.

When she was all out of prizes, we would have to devise some other way to entertain us. We played the license plate game, where the one who sees the most out-of-state license plates wins. We played build-a-word, where the one who makes the most small words out of a large word in five minutes wins. We used to bring coloring books with us until the time the jumbo box of Crayons the one with 72 crayons and a sharpener in the back, melted all over the back of the green station wagon. Needless to say, no coloring books appeared in the car from that day on, and my sisters and I had a hard time sitting down for hours following my father's discovery that the mess. Tic-tac-toe, hangman and connect the dots also were popular.

We soon tired of mental, sit-down games like auto bingo and tic-tac-toe and turned to more physical entertainment. One of our favorite games was Feet Fight. We'd crawl into the "back" (the area of a station wagon beyond the back seat) and kick each other in the feet and legs as hard as we could. We played Play Fight, the same game those kids I saw on I-35 were playing. The "way-back" also was a good playground. In Statues, you had to assume a silly-looking pose and stay completely still until five cars passed. We were tired of Statues, we'd make faces at the people in other cars. We never tired of making the universal "Honk Your Horn" sign at every wheeler we passed.

When we ran out of things to do, we'd get cranky. We'd get into each other of taking up more than the allotted third of the car and it would inevitably lead to real fighting. We'd be hitting and punching when Dad, with his eyes still on the road, would reach over the seat and start hitting anyone within arm's length. I learned to avoid this by using our forearms as shields, and in the end we'd end up laughing and making faces at him behind his back. He'd always be that in the rearview mirror and those immortal words every child of a trip hates to hear.

"Am I going to have to pull this car over?"

"No, Dad, we'll be good, we promise."

"I mean it girls, one more time and I am pulling this car over."

He never pulled over.

By the time this happened, we were all ready to read, sleep or look out the window, and my parents' nerves were left alone for an hour or two. But we got bored again and the whole process would start all over again. My parents deserve a special award for taking us to many places. I think that when I tell kids I'll let the neighbors take them on family vacations.

Paula Vogrin is a senior journalism major and a columnist for The Battalion.

The babies still have proud parents

Throughout my life, my sister has taught me many lessons. As befits a sibling who's older, she often instructs by example. Rather than have a child herself, she said there were too many unwanted children in the world and so she adopted one. This is how the sweet and delightful Lillian came into my life.



Richard Cohen

licized, what will be the effect on a kid who learns that one parent was compelled by the other to give her up?

No one knows the answers to these questions. Surrogate motherhood is too new for conclusions to be drawn and, anyway, we still know relatively little about human behavior. I have talked to a former family-court judge, a child psychologist who specializes in custody cases and a psychotherapist. For my questions, they had nothing but more questions. The Talmudic tradition lives in the field of mental health.

But the former family-court judge did raise the issue of ownership, what might be called procreative capitalism. Some people want a child that is theirs, that they "own." They seek a clone and want to treat the child as an extension of themselves — a statement of who they are. In this sense, children become a consumer good, like cars. They announce status. For some people, the perfect child is one who behaves the way they would like, attends the "right" school and then has a career that complements those of the parents.

All of this is understandable, although not necessarily admirable. We all know people who see their own status on the line if their child is not admitted to a certain school. We all know the Little League father who doesn't recognize that it is his child — not him — who's up at the plate. We all know the parent who wants a child to "marry well" — an ugly phrase that has nothing to do with happiness and everything to do with status and wealth.

Adoption limits those possibilities. For the parents, it means going outside their own gene pool into terra incognita.

Whose child is this we are getting? Will it be bright? Will it be dumb? Will it have my ear for music, my zest for dancing? Will it have grandpop's gift for math and grandma's cutting wit? Will it be like us?

These are tough questions. But what have they to do with love? What have they to do with wanting a baby for its own sake? What have they to do with the hard and true lessons of parenting — the demands on time, the need to share, the slow comprehension that even our "own" children are not ours but are unique unto themselves?

These are the universal experiences of parenting. The people I know who have adopted children love them no less because they are not "their own." In some ways, maybe, they love them more. Whatever the case, they love them. God, how they love those kids.

I go back and forth on the issue of surrogate mothers. I empathize with people who seek children in this manner. They want what I already have. But if the insemination of a stranger was achieved in the usual way, we would be a lot quicker to say what we think — and maybe disapprove. It hardly helps matters that money also changes, with the well-off paying the less-well-off to have a baby.

But the world is awash with unwanted babies. They are mostly black, brown or yellow and to some people that makes a difference. This can be a difficult route, but the outcome is sweet: a child. A child as good or bad as any other — as unique as a snowflake and, in a hug, no different at all. This is how the sweet and delightful Lillian came into my life. She is the lesson my sister taught me.

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Mail Call

Open mind

EDITOR:

I would like to thank Melanie Shouse for her letter in the March 11 Mail Call. It is quite refreshing to find that there is at least one student on this campus whose mind has not been sealed shut with concrete. Her attitude of tolerance is one that should be adopted by everyone.

We live in a world with more than five billion people — each one unique and very different from the next. We cannot hope to coexist if we cannot even accept the diversity of the human race. It may take some time, and certainly much effort, but I believe that if we make the attempt to tolerate all those people who "irritate" us, this tiny planet will be a much more pleasant place.

Come on, Ags! Give it a try. Instead of complaining about things that you cannot possibly change, learn to accept them as just another facet of our existence — just as I try to tolerate those who don't accept me for what I am.

Dave Martin
Vice President, Gay Student Services

A&M's OK by them

EDITOR:

Our son is a freshman at A&M, and during the past months I have contacted the financial aid office, the Registrar's office and the Department of Agriculture several times. I have spoken to both male and female employees and/or employee/students, and have been very impressed and GRATEFUL that all my calls or letters have been hassle-free and have provided me with the information I have needed. In this day and age, this is unusual, unfortunately. Persons I have related this to are always amazed and impressed. We are very proud our son is a Texas Aggie! Your institution of higher learning is to be commended.

Mr. and Mrs. Curtis H. Urban

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